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ABSTRACT

This manual contains suggestions for secondary school teacher aides, substitute teachers, and beginning teachers. Sections on teacher aides and substitute teachers focus on the general attitudes toward and of these paraprofessional school personnel. Also discussed in these sections are problems, and some solutions, that teacher aides and substitute teachers often face. The section on teaching discusses "basics," such as preparation, planning, positive classroom management techniques and teaching methods, and student evaluation. Sections on teachers' personal attitudes and behaviors, teachers' relationships with students, classroom management, student discipline, and teacher professionalism contain suggestions for dealing with or avoiding problems school personnel sometimes have in fulfilling their duties. Throughout the manual, positive attitudes toward job responsibilities and self-esteem are emphasized. (JD)

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HEADSTART for

Aides

Substitutes

Teachers

A Guide for New Secondary School Educators

a manual completed in 1982
by Patricia M. Summers
for a graduate course at
Rider College, Lawrenceville, NJ

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INTRODUCTION

If you want to get up every morning from September to June eager to go to school, instead of hoping for snow days and counting the hours till weekends, this publication is for you. The best thinking of those associated with public schools - students, teachers, supervisors, administrators - is collected here to serve as your headstart.

AIDES

As an aide, you might sometime wish you had an aide; that's how frustrating or even unsatisfying the job can be. And yet, as a teacher - for that's what you are, in responsibility and potential influence - you can also find the job most satisfying. Like the rest of those on the teaching staff, you are part of a gigantic democratic process: free public education. You can help the system to do a smoother job, to turn out more sensitive and thoughtful graduates, better able to improve themselves and their world.

Where do you come in, you ask. Maybe you can't see the connection between your role in study halls, the lunchroom, the halls and the lavatories - and the educational process. But you can make a big difference in how students regard themselves, others, the school - and you, of course. Whether or not they seem so, high school students are very impressionable. They notice how others behave and they imitate what they see and hear. Knowing that you're on stage at every moment, just as every other member of the school staff is, you might want to give even more thought to what you say and do.

But, you say, your job is like a police officer's - always looking for lawbreakers. Even if that were accurate, and it really isn't, there are good and bad police reps. You might as well be a good one, right?

You're not the only one enforcing laws, either. There must be some groundrules for people living together in a social institution as

big as a school, and every staff member observes and helps to enforce state and local laws, even if they don't agree with each one.

School administrators are sometimes advised to think of themselves as facilitators; they're supposed to make teaching easier for those on the faculty. Teachers are facilitators too; they help students to learn successfully. That's where you come in. You facilitate the smoother operation of the school by helping to make study hall a place where students can get some school work done; by helping to make the cafeteria a place where students can eat with the least amount of disruption; by helping to make lavatories serve the basic purposes for which they were intended.

If you do your job well, others have a better shot at doing theirs well too.

Here are some ideas designed to assist you.

1. Know what your duties are and do them, calmly and courteously. If a teacher is polite to students (and why shouldn't s/he be?), students are usually polite in return.

For instance, the way you approach a student, especially one who seems to be doing something wrong, makes all the difference, just as in dealing with adults. If you talk to him/her nicely, the chances are it'll work out.

2. If in your dealings with a student, you believe you are not being treated with courtesy, be extra courteous yourself. The less likeable another person's manner might be, the more correct yours should be. Remember - you're older and wiser. Your manner can say that; you never need to put it into words.

3. If a situation gets out of control, remove yourself from it Contact an administrator. Let him/her facilitate. Avoid arguing in the hall; avoid shouting matches. If you don't avoid these things, what will the student have learned from you?

4. Smile. If you look pleasant, you feel pleasant. (And don't you prefer smiling police officers?)

5. Think of study hall and lunch duty as a chance to get to know and help more students. If you approach them with this attitude, you will be helpful.

6. Treat study hall and lunch duty as a class: Be on time, be organized, be clear about your expectations, be consistent, be sensitive to kids.

7. Keep in mind that just as <u>you</u> don't like this kind of answer, neither do students: "Do it because I said so."

8. Remember that kids feel better about a situation in which they know what's expected of them and they're treated firmly and politely. The better they feel, the fewer discipline problems there will be.

<u>NOTE</u>: The sections on discipline, personal attitude and behavior, and professionalism include details on topics raised here. Will you read them too?

SUBSTITUTES

If you've been a substitute teacher even once in your life, or if you know someone who has, then you know all the stories about subs: They're easy marks for kids; they're expensive babysitters; they're masochists (or sadists) . . . they take the money and run.

The truth? It depends on the substitute, of course. The theory of individual differences applies here too.

Administrators, aware that some students, seeing a substitute, think school's out, are often extra protective of subs. Their thinking goes like this: For the day you substitute in a school, you're a member of the school staff. Administrators expect the same cooperation from you as they expect from regular staff members. They in turn give you the same support they give regulars.

As a substitute teacher, you have a moral commitment. You're not a babysitter who happens to have an educational background. You owe the people who pay you a professional day's work. You're expected to follow the absent teacher's directions intelligently and to relate to kids in a positive way. As far as possible, you're supposed to keep the educational process happening. And all of this can be done, too. Here's how.

1. Get to school as early as you can. (If regular teachers come early to get a jump on things, how much more vital is it that you, without a day-to-day toehold, also get there early?) Prepare for each class.

2. Look at the teacher's plans. Make sure you know where you're

going, and when. If you can avoid saying anything like, "Now let's see what I'm supposed to be doing here" in front of a group of students, you're ahead of the game.

3. Discourage students who try to tell you what should be done; for instance, "Our teacher always lets us do our homework in class on Friday." You've prepared yourself. Now do your job.

4. Avoid letting students leave the room for unnecessary errands like trips to their lockers. Otherwise, you could experience chaos in no time.

5. Eliminate occasions for problems. Have something for students to do every minute of the period. In case a teacher's plan is non-existent, incomplete or short, bring some things of your own to do each time you substitute. As teachers are advised to do, always have extras ready.

6. Giving a "study hall" (which of course hardly ever turns out that way) is a cop-out, pure and simple. You are a <u>teacher</u>.

7. Tell an administrator if you need help of any kind. <u>Then</u> you can reasonably expect to get it.

> <u>NOTE</u>: The sections on discipline, personal attitude and behavior, and professionalism include details on topics raised here. Will you read them too?

TEACHING

Suddenly you're very close to your first week of teaching: five days, each with five or more different classes, and countless students who all will know you're a new teacher.

You try to remember highlights from those methods courses. You look for words of wisdom in old notebooks. You conjure up your happiest student teaching experiences in an effort to reassure yourself.

Most of all, though, you're screaming inside: What am I going to do?! And the very next question is: Will I be any good?

It's wasted effort to tell you to relax, that it'll all work out . . . even though it probably will. By the end of that first teaching week, you'll have trouble remembering how you feel now.

But now is where you are, and you must get through it. The material on teaching which follows is meant to remind you of the planning, instructing and evaluating basics; of how to do the job. Read through it - and then get started on those lesson plans.

PREPARATION

1. Plan. Plan. Plan. Then revise your plans. Practice them. Rewrite them. Go into every class knowing exactly what you want to do and how you're going to do it.

Anticipate the student problems and questions a lesson might prompt. By doing the assignments yourself, you'll be able to prevent trouble ahead of time.

2. Over-plan. Put together more material and more activities than you could possibly get through in one class period. That way, you'll never have that panicky "Oh, my God, I've finished the lesson plan and we still have 15 minutes" feeling.

3. Don't be satisfied with over-planning. Always have something extra - a short writing exercise, a puzzle, an experiment, a list of spelling demons - in your briefcase or desk drawer.

4. Remember that you're trying to establish a reputation. You can't go into class unprepared. Kids sense it. You know better.

5. Develop your daily and weekly lesson plans from the long range unit planning you've done. You have to know what you want to achieve ultimately if you're to judge whether your day-to-day work is going in that direction, and going at a reasonable rate.

6. A typical lesson plan ought to tell you (and anyone else who reads it) objectives, procedures, materials and timing. Think of a lesson as you do a letter; it needs an opening, a body, a closing. You can vary your approach to these basic lesson parts.

7. If you indicate for yourself about how long each part of the lesson will run, you're less likely to be sidetracked or to lose sight of priorities. Just put a circled 15 or 35 in the margin next to each part of your plan as a reminder of approximate minutes to be spent.

8. "Imitation is suicide," Emerson said. Don't become your graduate school teachers for your high school classes. First of all, graduate teachers usually aren't noted for exceptional teaching methods. More important, graduate subject matter is not high school subject matter.

9. As for motivating students, "Genius is 99% perspiration and 1%

inspiration."

Remember what you know about learning theories, and consider these four types of learning activities as you plan: (1) those requiring presentation by the teacher, (2) those allowing for interaction among students, (3) those involving laboratory experiences, (4) those which the student can pursue on his/her own.

10. Make sure that class activities relate to assessment activities. Don't teach in one way and test in another. For instance, if students will be evaluated for solving problems in a certain way, teach and practice that way in class.

11. For your substitute kit, plan something your students can use and the replacement can handle. Follow up on the work when you return so students will know it wasn't busy work.

IN CLASS

1. Develop class morale from the beginning. Always be positive. Make students know you're concerned and you want them to progress. Make them want your praise.

2. Concentrate on every class you teach. Don't let yourself be preoccupied with other matters, such as health, family problems, job issues.

3. Avoid having favorites or appearing to pick on anyone. In calling on students, call on a spread, not always the same few.

4. Avoid saying, "You misunderstood" or "You didn't understand." This can make a student feel defensive or resentful. Instead, try "Maybe I didn't make that clear."

5. Praise students whenever you genuinely can. It doesn't cost

anything, and it's so welcome. Tell a student s/he did a great project, or write a note about an achievement or an attitude you appreciate.

At first your students might look at you strangely. They're not used to this. Soon they'll be working harder than ever to merit your positive notice. (And of course their working harder than ever - and doing better things in the process - warrants your attention!) It's a chain reaction - the best kind.

6. Try showing the relation of one subject to another. Eventually, kids will learn that no discipline really exists in isolation from others. You can help them to see this.

7. Avoid expressing your own ideas too often in class. Try the question method instead, and be sure to raise as many questions about the side you favor as about the ones you don't. Don't give students the chance to accuse you of penalizing them for having opinions different from yours.

8. Remember that every student has his/her own best way of learning. One will be verbal; another will feel more comfortable writing. Give students a chance to express themselves in their strongest way by varying the format of assignments, class activities and evaluation methods.

9. Think of your students as co-workers with you in education. Tell them why you do things and what you're aiming for. When they're ready, involve them in setting goals and making decisions.

Some work <u>can't</u> be anything but drudgery, yet it must be done. Tell the class that, do it together and get it over with.

10. <u>You</u> want success - as much of it as you can get. So do students. Aim for a success-a-day for each of your kids. Don't let a student reach

the frustration level as soon as s/he tries something. If a thing can't be done, it won't be done.

EVALUATION

1. Make sure you know the outcome you expected and taught for.

2. Do enough evaluating of student achievement to get a balanced view.

3. If too many students are not doing well, talk with your curriculum chairperson. Talk with yourself first.

4. Consider pre- and post-testing.

5. Check student folders in the guidance office. See how kids did in other courses besides yours.

6. If you don't get the result you sought, take another look at your objectives and your activities. Self-evaluate.

7. To avoid end-of-class restlessness, give tests kids can't finish in the time allowed. Tell them to do as much as they can, as well as they can. Explain your system and mark accordingly.

8. Students don't learn much from a lonely number or letter grade on their papers. Your comments, as many of them as possible, make a big difference. They show that you spent enough time to react in words, and they lessen the arbitrary nature of some grades.

9. Inform and involve parents in your teaching and evaluation. Don't let a low grade come as a total surprise to them. Enlist their help through phone calls or notes.

Contact parents with good news about their kids too. Give them a pleasant surprise.

10. Believe that your students can learn and succeed (they can,

you know). The teacher's expectations for a class really do affect the performance of the group - as well as of the teacher.

There is no one right way to teach; it's the teacher's attitude toward students that makes the difference.

11. Remember: You don't teach math (or shop or science or history); you teach <u>students</u>.

PERSONAL ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR

Do you think you're pretty good (and do you want to get even better)? Do you want to change the world and believe that maybe you can? Do you know your subject matter? Do you have intellectual curiosity and ambition? Do you empathize with others?

In other words, how's your self-concept? If your view of yourself is generally positive; if you regard yourself as a balanced and a caring person, then you might aspire to be a teacher.

If you don't think much of yourself, why should anyone else?

So the first point is that you ought to approach your profession with the attitude that there's a job to be done and you know you can do it.

Here are some other suggestions for becoming a confident, effective teacher - whether a beginner or a veteran.

1. Greet students in the hall or wherever you see them. If you don't know their names, a "hi" indicates you know they're there.

2. Form your own opinion of your students, in spite of hearsay. Don't assume they'll cause the same trouble for you as they might have caused for others. (If you do assume that, and act accordingly, you can bet they'll be the same.)

3. Smile whenever it's appropriate. Why not? Wouldn't you rather deal with pleasant looking people than with blank-faced or scowling ones?

4. Let students save face. Don't demand apologies or abject confessions or personal information. People don't need to announce their

intentions publicly in order to change.

5. Do more than the minimum, more than only what your contract calls for.

6. Generally it's better to under-react than to over-react in just about any situation: questions you think are too personal; misbehavior; criticism. Minimize your response if you are emotionally involved. Take time. Count to 10. Then react.

7. With anything you ask a student to do, put yourself on his/her side and ask yourself, "How would I feel about this?"

8. Accept the inevitable. You might be very excited about a lesson . . . but the kids aren't. Then you get bored because they are. This happens sometime. Re-think what you're doing. Try again.

You plan for a lively class discussion - and get silence. Remember that some students aren't used to talking in class; they aren't used to having their opinions asked. It takes time to get them where you want them to be.

You'll be horrified at their grade-consciousness. Until the whole system is changed, though, all you can hope to do is suggest other values.

You'll be startled at how students scrutinize teachers: "You go to movies?" "You wear jeans?!" "You eat Cocoa Puffs?"

You'll feel hurt when peer pressure makes some students almost embarrassed to be nice to teachers. Keep smiling.

9. Decide before you even start the job, or before you start a new day, that you will be excellent. (Otherwise, why bother?) Failures will be more distressing to you than to other people, but you'll try harder and longer. And if you want to be excellent strongly enough, you will be.

The most important things in school teaching are: You've got to like yourself, you've got to like young people, and you've got to like teaching.

RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS

As a new teacher, or even a teacher starting a new year, think long and seriously about the relationship you want to have with students. First impressions can be hard to overcome.

The old idea that you're better off to be too strict than too easy has merit. It's easier to modify firmness or formality than the opposite. It's easier to encourage kids to open up than to get them to back off.

You may be close to your students' age or in some ways close to their interests. That could work for you or against you. The camaraderie that sometimes exists among college students or between them and their profs is better not carried over to high school. Students could misunderstand. They could put you in an awkward position with comments or expectations.

Maybe it comes to this: To be friendly does not mean to be familiar. Remember - you're the teacher, not the student. There is and must be a difference.

You know very well that students learn best from teachers they have regard for. Here are some ways you can earn that regard.

1. The first day of school . . . don't let them know you're scared. In fact, don't be scared. Be so prepared and so enthusiastic about your plans for the year that you can't wait to meet each new class.

2. "You're Jennifer . . . No? Barbara, then? . . . You must be Kathy . . . Give me a minute . . . Of course! You're Sheila . . . Oh,

well. I'll have it straight by tomorrow."

Learn your students' names as fast as you can. Everyone likes to be known by name - that is, by the name they prefer, pronounced correctly.

A seating chart, which you might discard after you know people, is probably the best way for you to do this. On it, you can put phonetic pronunciation and maybe even clues to help you link individuals with names.

3. Treat students as if they are mature persons, like yourself. Treat them the way you'd like them to treat you; show them what you expect by the way you behave.

4. You and your students have a lot in common. Just as you need praise and want to know how you're doing on the job, they do too. Just as you need a kind word, or more than that, to help you through a rough day, they do too. Just as you might come to school eating yourself up over problems at home, they do too. Just as you feel better about yourself and other people when you like your appearance, they do too, and even more.

5. As corny as it might sound in these seemingly sophisticated days, you're a role model. Oh, your students probably wouldn't admit it, and they might not even realize it, but they watch you and learn from you. They'll imitate you too.

6. Spend a lot of time with individual students before and after school, at lunch time and in study halls, helping them with your subject. Students will get to know you're a helping kind of person and you care about them as individuals.

Working with students one-on-one outside of class helps in the class. It's just about impossible to have "a bad group" when you've worked

individually with many of them.

Not only do you get to know students through out-of-class sessions, but students get to know you better too. They quickly see that the classroom you isn't the only you. Student and teacher can both open up more outside of class. Look for occasions to help students - and help yourself while you're at it.

7. Take an interest in as many individual students as you can. If you know a student plays the saxophone, ask him/her to play it for you after school or maybe during class. Notice things . . . a nice sweater, a ring or pin, a model airplane brought in for science class.

8. Keep your hands to yourself. Students can misinterpret the most innocent pats on the shoulder. By the same token, avoid endearing names like "Hon" and "Love," no matter how casually you may bestow them. You're better off getting attention for being an excellent teacher than for being - however unintentionally - a sex object.

9. Be ready to get what you give. If you tease students about their appearance or life style, don't be surprised when they try the same thing with you. If you don't think you'd enjoy that kind of treatment, maybe you shouldn't start it. Don't ask, "How's your love life?" if you don't want to be asked the same question.

Students complain about teachers who dish it out but can't take it. It might be a good practice to decide whether turnabout would be fair play before you start anything.

10. Students are people with rights. They are more aware of their rights than ever before. Don't exploit students by assuming they must run errands or wash boards for you.

11. Do you know why so many teachers are forever involved in coaching or co-curricular activities in general? They get to know kids in a way they never would in classroom contacts. It's very satisfying.

Talk about rapport. Talk about getting more than you give. Advising a co-curricular activity will compensate for uncertainties or dissatisfactions you may have in your teaching. And the things you learn will carry over to your teaching.

12. How far do you go as a counselor to students? Sometimes kids don't need advice or talk so much as they need a listener. You can handle that without worrying, especially if you're noncommittal or at least non-directive. Try to ask questions instead of making judgments. Avoid being caught in the middle between a kid and another teacher.

13. Don't get in over your head with a troubled student. How deep is too deep, you ask? If you're in doubt, you'd better refer the student to someone else . . . even if you think you could be helpful because you understand the case better than anyone else.

You must realize that some kids are con artists who need an audience, and once they read you as available and caring, you could be in for increasingly farfetched stories . . . that some kids need professional help - and unless your profession is psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker, you can't give it.

It's not a defeat for you to admit you're unqualified. It's a sign of good judgment and maturity to know when a problem student must be re-routed, for his/her own sake and yours.

Learn to recognize the chronic case: the student who's there waiting to talk to you every time you turn around. Realize that you may have

100 other students who also need you on some level or other. Don't be so helpful that you're really not helpful at all.

14. Keep in mind that the problems a student has are just as important to him/her as adult problems are to you.

15. On being liked, or loved, by students . . . It's a tricky matter. You're probably best off not to aim for that. Just do your job the best way you can. Put in all the time, and more, that's needed. Be as helpful and caring as humanly possible. Practice the traits you want to teach. Result? They'll like you - and for the best reasons, too.

If you set out to be liked, on the other hand, you might concentrate less on the things you're being paid to do. You can accomplish two things by doing one well.

MANAGEMENT

Call it "management," "organization," "routine" . . . Just so you know what you're doing - and your students do too.

Whether or not they announce it to you; whether or not they even consciously know it, teenagers want some consistent rules. They feel secure with some routine. They're also smart enough to take advantage of a teacher who isn't consistent in expectations or grading. You can save yourself a lot of grief by determining reasonable standards - for behavior, for paper format, for evaluation - and sticking to them. Don't bargain. Don't bribe. And don't apologize for demanding students' best efforts.

As for routine, they'll follow your lead. For instance, it's a good idea for you and your students to get into the habit of starting class when the bell rings. If they're used to your being in the room with your books and papers ready, and to your starting promptly . . . they'll do the same. You'll never reach the point of wishing you had a cow bell to get their attention. Students will have learned you mean business.

Now, some specific suggestions . . .

1. The first day: Put yourself in their place. They're wondering who you are and what your class will be like. Put your name on the board. Say it, too, so they can see and hear it. Tell them the name of the course so those in the wrong place can find out early

Learn who they are, maybe by taking attendance from your class list.

Pause after each student identifies him/herself; try to make an association. Make a seating chart.

Even though you'll have clerical work and book distribution to take care of, do something to let kids know what they'll be doing in your class. You might talk about it, you might involve them in a discussion, and you might spell it out on a ditto.

Make an assignment during this first class. From this and from your manner in general, they'll know you take your work seriously.

2. Keep attendance on the class printouts for a couple of weeks. Once the drop and add period is over, transfer names and attendance information into your roll book.

3. Set up your gradebook (and your grading system) to distinguish different kinds of grades, such as quizzes, tests, essays, projects . . . and to show late or missing work.

4. Stagger due dates for assignments. A sure way to sink into deep depression is to assign 110 projects, all due at the same time - the same time, that is, as you also expect to be grading midterm exams.

5. As you take daily attendance, remember to note for your records as well as for the office, when someone's absent - even when the student's name is on the attendance bulletin.

6. Do some things at the same time each class period, for instance, taking attendance, making and collecting assignments.

7. Make your expectations clear, for your sake and for your students' sakes. This might have started with the first-day handout already mentioned. It's helpful for everyone if you duplicate the due dates for regular and/or major assignments, and distribute them. Then there can be no question.

8. Preview films and other audio-visual material. Then you can prepare guide questions and assignments ahead of time, and you won't be in the embarrassing position of trying to show a film which was never re-wound.

9. Complete all forms promptly. Double check your work.

10. Be on time - or early - for classes and meetings. A panting, disheveled teacher attracts attention alright, but is it the kind you had in mind?

11. Prevent vandalism . . . by scanning desktops each time you walk into a classroom . . . by keeping a seating chart . . . by walking around during class . . . by re-checking desks after each class. If you inherit defaced desks from another class, communicate with that teacher so your students won't be blamed.

12. Be organized and use routines without becoming an automaton. Some sidetracking and flexibility are necessary and advisable. Everyone likes a change of pace.

DISCIPLINE

Like teaching, the idea of discipline can be scary - until you have the experience and find out you can handle it. Like teaching, too, discipline calls for planning, consistency and courtesy.

1. Set standards and keep them. In a positive, non-threatening way, make your expectations clear. This is preventive discipline - the best kind.

2. Don't say you'll do a thing without doing it; don't promise a thing without delivering it . . . whether you're talking punishment or reward.

3. Don't get angry when students misbehave. Otherwise, it gets to be fun to provoke your irritation. Don't yell, shout or scream at an entire class or group. It's undignified and it doesn't work. Instead, talk with individuals - as privately as possible.

4. Don't punish an entire group, or threaten to do so.

5. Don't ever call names. You might apologize later, but that doesn't erase the memory.

6. Don't try to teach a class while students in the group are also talking. Pause until there is silence, to show the students what you expect for yourself and for any speaker.

7. If while you're teaching a student misbehaves, react the first time by stopping what you're doing and simply looking at him/her. That's

often all you'll need to do.

8. Talk to students frankly, plainly. If you have to make a correction, do it in a forthright, firm way.

9. Be tenacious. If you take a course of disciplinary action with a kid, follow through.

10. If you discipline a student on one day, make sure the very next day to say something favorable to him/her. Your doing this, before or during class, will indicate that the earlier problem has been forgotten, that you operate issue by issue.

11. In overcoming any problem, get to the student alone - in the hall or after school. Try to determine what the problem is and work it out on a one-to-one basis.

If a student says or does something that seems offensive to you, talk with him or her privately. Before you give your impressions, get his/her perceptions of what happened. Asking questions and exchanging viewpoints - instead of starting with conclusions - can result in a more workable situation than you thought you had.

12. Maintain the utmost courtesy - and increase courtesy as you have reason to be annoyed.

13. Don't try to see or hear everything; sometimes the best reaction is to pretend you didn't see it or hear it.

If you call a student on every single little thing he/she does, your effect is lessened and you won't be able to do anything else.

14. The most important kind of discipline is self-discipline. That's what you're trying to develop in your students.

Kids should do right whether or not you're in the room. They should do

right not for you, but for themselves.

15. One of the best things to do about a severe problem is to bring in a student's parents. When this happens, don't be the prosecuting attorney; be specific and positive, with an implicit or stated attitude of "How can we work together to help _____ with . . . ."

16. Try to handle every problem, of course, but remember that there are other resources in the school for this too. Seek advice or aid from counselors and chairpersons or other administrators.

PROFESSIONALISM

"Professionalism" . . . . Don't bother looking it up. No definition could cover all the possibilities or satisfy all the expectations.

Educators talk as often about its lack as about its presence. Some say if you've got to ask what it is, you're never going to know.

"Professionalism" is easier to sense than to spell out. But that doesn't make it less important. Think of the school person you admire most, maybe a teacher or administrator you hope to learn from and be like. Wanting a more specific word, you'd probably have to describe his/her best traits as "professional."

Professionalism of course is in the eye of the beholder. Here is how some connoisseurs of the quality identify its characteristics.

1. Turn in things on time. Get to class on time.

2. Keep professional matters for professionals. Don't discuss teacher issues with students.

3. Keep things to yourself. Don't repeat what you're told in confidence or what you overhear.

4. Be loyal to your school, especially outside of your school.

5. Don't let students talk negatively about your colleagues. You might tell them with a smile that you're always glad to hear good things about other teachers.

6. Go through channels - no matter how hard or distasteful that may be. You can't teach students to do that and not do it yourself.

Ask questions; don't assume. If something seems wrong, ask the person in charge, rather than deciding in isolation and dreaming up motives while you're at it. A lot of pre-ulcer cases could be prevented . . . a lot of headaches and displays of temper . . . if teachers would only ask.

Administrators advertise their open doors. Use them.

7. Don't talk to students about your personal problems. Your job is to teach, not to gripe or cry. Show kids by your self-contained-but-friendly manner a behavior pattern they might imitate. Attend to the job at hand.

8. Keep your classroom or office door open when you're conferring with a student on any subject. Propriety helps both of you.

9. Avoid faculty factions and teachers' room politics. You have enough to do for the first few years just learning to be a good teacher.

Be at least as concerned about kids as about teacher welfare.

10. Show respect for all of your colleagues, especially the veterans who before you came made the school what it is.

Find the two or three best teachers in the school and try to get to know them so you can learn from them.

11. Be ambitious, but don't over-extend yourself. Volunteer for the school committees you can handle and still keep your emphasis on teaching. Serving on a committee with an administrator lets each of you see the other in a different light.

Join appropriate professional associations, including those in your discipline. Receiving literature and joining committees can help you and your profession.

12. Make sure that you're preparing students for the next step they'll take; that you're trying to achieve the school's goals.

13. New teachers should be seen and not heard, at least some of the time. The new teacher can generate antipathy by seeming to know everything about anything, judging by the number of times s/he talks at faculty meetings.

Entering a new situation, you're wise to sit back and find out who's what . . . and then decide whom to associate with.

14. Even though it's a letting-off-steam place, the faculty room is also a pretty public place. So don't say things you might regret later. For instance, why not decide to discuss only the students who do good work?

15. In these days dress codes are out of style and dress has become an individual matter. Still, the professional might consider two things: (1) dress ought to be attractive; students ought to be looking at someone who wears neat, clean, reasonably varied clothes; (2) dress ought to be appropriate for an educational atmosphere. For instance, if students are asked not to wear certain kinds of clothing, teachers should avoid them too.

16. Be familiar with school law in your state. Ignorance of that law - about your rights and responsibilities, and those of administrators, students and parents - is no defense. And no use, either.

Just for instance, do you know administrators' groundrules for evaluating non-tenured teachers . . . teachers' limitations regarding corporal punishment . . . parents' liability for student vandalism . . . students' rights to privacy of information? You should know all these things, and much more.

17. If you don't know it already, learn it now: Your school's

secretaries are key people; you must get along with them.

Like students, secretaries deserve courtesy, patience, praise. They ought to be treated as professionals; after all, you expect professional results from them. For instance, call a secretary "Ms._____" until requested otherwise. Thank her for a job well done. Greet her when you see her. Occasionally you might have cause to commend her, out loud or in writing, to her boss.

Secretaries are more influential than many teachers give them credit for being. Now you know.

18. Keep in touch with your administrators. Let them know when you do something particularly good with students. Ask their help when you're in trouble. Remember that a new teacher is infinitely improvable. Pay attention when they supervise you and try to put their suggestions into practice.

19. Don't be a "new breed" teacher - one who sees nothing good in the educational establishment. "Establishment," "hierarchy," "management," "administration": Those are <u>not</u> automatically negative words!

Schools <u>do</u> have problems and limitations. But if you're going to solve them, you're most likely to do it <u>through</u> the system, and not by talking or acting <u>against</u> the system - especially when that system pays you.

20. Concentrate on becoming excellent in your classroom, your own little world. Gain confidence and authority so that when you make suggestions or take stands, others will listen to you.